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U.S. sabotaged Geneva accords

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Third of a series of articles

Official U.S. policy statements on Indochina issued to the public characteristically have charged the Vietnamese with the crimes actually being committed by the U.S. From 1954 to the present day, among the U.S. ideological keystones have been the spurious claims of North Vietnamese aggression and violations of the 1954 Geneva settlement.

Although U.S. responsibility for sabotaging the Geneva agreements has been recognized widely for well over a decade, the first time it was seriously suggested in the New York Times was last month in its final installment of documents and reports from the Pentagon's history of U.S. intervention in Vietnam.

Following the disastrous French defeat at Dien-bienphu in May 1954 as well as serious military reverses elsewhere in Indochina, France finally faced the necessity of negotiations to avoid complete destruction of its forces. The ensuing settlement at Geneva contained provisions for a durable peace in Indochina. But as quickly as French troops left Indochina the U.S. began its direct intervention, preventing essential provisions of the Geneva agreement from being carried out.

Armed resistance begins

As is well known, the U.S. caused its puppet Ngo Dinh Diem to be installed in Saigon, even before the settlement had been reached in Geneva. Under programs financed and largely conceived by his CIA tutors, Diem instituted a neo-fascist regime. Thousands of patriots who had served in the anti-French resistance were assassinated or jailed and tortured. Armed struggle became the only road to survival; this developed spontaneously in some regions or under the direction of local cadres in others. Full-scale, coordinated resistance began with the formation of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam in December 1960, which was headed by a representative cross-section of the leadership of democratic and progressive organizations in the South.

In the U.S. version, which the American press rarely challenged (except to give a partially true picture as Diem neared his end in 1963), the Saigon puppets were treated as the legitimate rulers, threatened by subversive agents acting on behalf of Hanoi. In essence, according to Washington, in the late 1950s the U.S. was not intervening in Vietnam while "foreign aggression" was carried out by Vietnamese.

Unfortunately the press has only published a small amount of material from the Pentagon study on the period following the Geneva settlement. However, there is sufficient information from the Pentagon report to demonstrate that Washington consciously and deliberately was trying to crush the revolution in Vietnam and that virtually every public statement was nothing but a tissue of lies designed to conceal U.S. activities from the American people.

At various stages the U.S. and its apologists have blown hot and cold about the Geneva agreements. At the conference itself the chief U.S. delegate, Walter Bedell Smith, pledged that the U.S. would not upset them by force. In the years following, however, the U.S. was ambiguous, hardly concealing their dissatisfaction. Dissatisfied they well might be, for Bedell Smith's initial

instructions from President Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles opposed any international recognition of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, which had existed for nearly nine years and led the resistance against the French.

Blind policies

Prior to the Geneva conference itself, Washington policy papers of 1954 underscored U.S. aims in Indochina as "a military victory" for the French, whose armies were on their last legs—indicating the lack of realism in Washington. Thus it is not surprising that the U.S. worked to destroy the new peace. This was evident at the time to anyone who wanted to see what was happening in Vietnam.

Clearer than before, the newly available documents show that the U.S. never intended to respect the Geneva settlement. On August 3, 1954, just two weeks after the Geneva conference concluded, the National Security Council discussed Vietnam. About the meeting, Fox Butterfield in the Times wrote: "The objectives set by the [National Security] Council were 'to maintain a friendly non-Communist South Vietnam' and 'to prevent a Communist victory through all-Vietnam elections.'"

Although the Pentagon analyst denied that the U.S. "connived" with Diem to prevent national elections, Butterfield noted that Washington had made its desires known to Diem and when Diem later blocked the elections, the U.S. indicated its full "support." The Pentagon papers could hardly conceal the fact that Diem remained in power by virtue of U.S. backing, although the dependence on the U.S. is sometimes obscured, particularly in ascribing to Diem the repression for which U.S. was ultimately responsible.

Washington's cynical attitude toward the Geneva settlement was stated by John Foster Dulles in a cable to the U.S. embassy in Saigon on Dec. 11, 1955: "While we should certainly take no step to speed up the present process of decay of the Geneva accords, neither should we make the slightest effort to infuse life into them."

Perhaps the most revealing new document from the post-Geneva period is a lengthy report on the activities of the so-called Saigon Military Mission, headed by Col. Lansdale of the CIA. Ostensibly written by anonymous members of the group, there is no doubt that the report which eulogizes Lansdale was largely his doing. Lansdale's activities were described in fiction by Graham Greene, in "The Quiet American." Lansdale's chauvinism and callousness might also be compared to the comic strip character, Steve Canyon, like Lansdale an Air Force colonel.

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